



Kimberly A. Foster
Executive Director

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

COMMISSIONERS:
CAROL O. BIONDI
PATRICIA CURRY
ANN FRANZEN
SUSAN F. FRIEDMAN
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DR. LA-DORIS MCCLANEY
REV. CECIL L. MURRAY
SANDRA RUDNICK, VICE CHAIR
STACEY SAVELLE
ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, VICE CHAIR
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS
TRULA J. WORTHY-CLAYTON

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **October 1, 2007**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi
Ann Franzen
Susan F. Friedman
Helen A. Kleinberg
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Rev. Cecil L. Murray
Sandra Rudnick
Adelina Sorkin
Trula J. Worthy-Clayton
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Patricia Curry
Stacey Savelle

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda for the October 1, 2007, meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the September 17, 2007, general meeting will be considered on October 15.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- Chair Kleinberg expressed her pleasure at having served as the Commission chair for the past two years, and thanked vice chairs Sorkin and Rudnick and previous chair Williams for their help during her tenure. She also expressed appreciation to Commission and department staff, especially director Trish Ploehn and liaison Susan

Jakubowski. Vice Chair Rudnick thanked Chair Kleinberg for her time and effort, saying she had done an extraordinary job.

- **Commissioner Williams moved that the special meeting scheduled for November 19, 2007, be canceled. Commissioner Worthy-Clayton seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.**
- **Commissioner McClaney moved that a regular meeting be scheduled for November 19, 2007; Commissioner Williams seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.**
- **Commissioner McClaney moved that the regular meeting scheduled for November 5, 2007, be canceled. Commissioner Williams seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.**
- **Commissioner Williams moved that a special meeting be scheduled for November 5, 2007; Vice Chair Rudnick seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.**
- Changes to the Commission's bylaws made in 2003 allow up to three vice chairs, but a decision to specify two or three vice chairs in any given year must be made prior to that year's election. **Commissioner Biondi moved that this year's slate of officers include three vice chair seats; Commissioner McClaney seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.**
- Chair Kleinberg and executive director Kim Foster last week attended the first stakeholder meeting for the Mental Health Services Act's prevention and early intervention component. Commissioner Williams will also attend stakeholder meetings, and all Commissioners will be informed as to their dates, since the Commission is now a voting member of the planning group. In addition, Commissioner Curry will share a delegate position in funding discussions for transition-age youth with a representative from the Department of Children and Family Services.
- Ms. Foster introduced Matthew Hartigan, now providing support in the Commission office. Chair Kleinberg thanked the Executive Office for helping to ensure a full staff.
- A draft of the Commission's annual report should be going to Commissioners within the next week; Chair Kleinberg encouraged everyone to read it and provide feedback.
- Commissioner Williams announced that the Community Coalition would be honoring Commissioner Murray at an event to be held on October 25.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- Department of Children and Family Services director Trish Ploehn presented a matrix of strategic implementation efforts and child case counts by office as of June 30. This matrix was first designed during the tenure of former director David Sanders, and

allows for a ‘snapshot’ comparison with previous quarters. As shown, two offices will implement concurrent planning by November of this year, while three offices will roll out point of engagement by January 2008. Otherwise, the five strategic initiatives—also including strategic decision-making, team decision-making, and the Permanency Partners Program, or P3—are fully implemented in all DCFS regional offices.

The emergency response referrals shown on the matrix represent a cumulative figure for the quarter, not the number of referrals in process at any one time, and Ms. Ploehn explained the large number showing as being open longer than 30 days. When a referral for suspected child abuse or neglect is initially received, emergency response personnel evaluate the situation to decide if it is more appropriate to open a formal case through the court system or to refer the family to voluntary community programs and close the allegation. Ideally, this disposition is done within 30 days, so a family receives services as soon as possible and children are not delayed in the emergency response process for long periods. However, with the more intensive front-end assessment work now being done through point of engagement and other initiatives, more time is often needed to thoroughly evaluate the family’s circumstances. More resources may be necessary up front to meet the 30-day deadline, or the deadline itself may need to be adjusted to allow for in-depth assessments.

With the matrix’s aggregate data and without comparisons to prior periods, it is difficult to understand trends occurring within the department and whether more children are being moved out of the system. Permanent placement of some sort, for example, is required by law at the end of 12 to 18 months of family reunification services, but can take various forms: guardianship, adoption, or long-term foster care. Commissioners requested further information not contained in the matrix:

- ✓ A breakdown of the numbers of children in non-guardianship permanent placement—adoptions waiting to be finalized, children in long-term foster care, those placed with non-related guardians, those living with relatives, and so on
- ✓ The numbers of children in long-term placements with relatives, and their percentage of the total caseload
- ✓ The numbers of children on the adoption track and waiting to be freed for adoption
- ✓ The numbers of children participating in Kin-GAP (the Kinship Guardian Assistance Payments program), who have left the formal system but whose caregivers are still receiving payments

Commissioners found the breakdown by office very valuable, and also suggested that the matrix itself include a legend explaining the abbreviations used and perhaps a brief summary of each program or category, to make it a more useful tool for those not intimately familiar with DCFS. Some analysis would also be helpful, to sum up the meaning of increases or decreases in specific numbers over time in terms of the

department's progress toward its overall goals, and how implementation of the five strategies has affected caseload characteristics.

- DCFS reported to the Board of Supervisors last Tuesday that it has successfully closed this year's projected \$32.4 million budget shortfall through shifts in revenues and expenditures, using projected savings and making cuts in services and supplies, all without curtailments to staff positions. (For example, \$6.5 million in savings stemmed from a revision of staffing allocations, which have historically budgeted social worker positions at the CSW III level, to reflect the lower-paid CSW I and II positions that also exist. Revenue assumptions were also boosted by \$7.5 million in net county cost to reflect Department of Mental Health funding passthroughs for severely emotionally disturbed children.) Over the next four to six weeks, Susan Kerr will focus on a line by line analysis of the departmental budget, and spending will be monitored on at least a monthly basis, if not more frequently.

Commissioner Worthy-Clayton commended Ms. Ploehn and her staff for their hard work, and Ms. Ploehn thanked the Chief Executive Office for its collaborative help during the budgeting process, which she feels is emblematic of the new relationship created by the revised county governance structure recently put into place.

- Ms. Ploehn distributed copies of a motion made September 25 by Supervisor Mike Antonovich instructing the Chief Executive Office to identify the numbers of county employees out on long-term leave and to report on measures being taken within each department to address this issue and develop return-to-work procedures. An article from the *Daily News* on this subject was also distributed. Commissioners have recently inquired into long-term absences with regard to DCFS, but the issue clearly goes beyond a single department.
- Union negotiations for the upcoming three-year contract begin on October 4 and will primarily focus on caseloads, since the process over the last six months has concentrated on workloads. (Compensation issues have already been negotiated with the Chief Executive Office.) Although caseloads over the last few years have been reduced both statewide and in Los Angeles County, Commissioner Williams asked negotiators to keep in mind the importance of supporting families, as line workers are increasingly being looked to for case management expertise. High-quality visitation is also a key piece, and workers' schedules are often such that they are not on duty when families are available for visits with their children. Chair Kleinberg strongly urged that union discussions include the possibility of evening and weekend hours.
- The Chief Executive Office recently submitted a supplemental budget request of \$8.3 million to be drawn down over the next five years to fund the countywide arm of the Healthier Families, Stronger Communities, Thriving Children (HST) prevention initiative. The Board of Supervisors questioned how the countywide effort and the similar DCFS effort would interact and complement each other, and presentations and final funding requests for both arms of the HST initiative are now set for October 17.

ELECTION OF COMMISSION OFFICERS

Written ballots were distributed for the Commission's chair and three vice chair seats. Ms. Foster and Commissioner McClaney tallied the votes, and announced the slate of officers duly elected for the next year:

Chair: Adelina Sorkin
Vice Chairs: Ann Franzen
Stacey Savelle
Trula Worthy-Clayton

CHILDREN'S PLANNING COUNCIL JUVENILE JUSTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey began her presentation with a reference to her own personal involvement with the juvenile justice system: not only did she begin her career in Los Angeles County in 1969 at central juvenile hall, but both of her brothers served time in prison as young adults. Professionals simply don't look at juvenile justice in the same way as families do, she said, a difference that plays out across all systems but is particularly true with incarceration. Dr. McCroskey recently attended a Children's Defense Fund conference in Washington, DC, on America's "cradle to prison pipeline," and encouraged Commissioners to read the accompanying report on the Children's Defense Fund website. Issues are evident when one system at a time is examined, but following a cohort of children over time points up the cumulative impact of systemic failures. A black male born in 2001, for instance, has a one in three chance of going to prison, while a Latino male has a one in six chance, and a white male a one in 17 chance. Of black males, almost 600,000 nationwide are currently in state and Federal prison; fewer than 40,000 earn bachelor's degrees. "The situation is unconscionable," Dr. McCroskey said, and has an impact not only on individual families and communities, but on the future itself. "If we don't take on this issue here," she added, "we're letting down both our vision and our passion."

In 2006, as a member of the Children's Planning Council, Dr. McCroskey released a report on Los Angeles County's juvenile justice system, and in May 2007, the Board of Supervisors asked the Council to develop a series of specific, hard-hitting recommendations for reforming that system. Those 11 recommendations were submitted on June 12 of this year (prior to being presented to the Commission on June 18) and the Board asked the Chief Executive Office to review them.

In its August 31 report, included in Commissioner packets, the CEO disagreed with the proposed separation of the juvenile and adult functions of the Probation Department, and had questions about two other recommendations. First, the CEO believes that more thought should be given to the formation and funding of a research institute, relating to county government but existing outside of it, that would be created to pull together juvenile justice expertise from numerous sources—universities, think tanks, the public and private sectors, and so on. The CEO also wants more research and discussion about setting standards for the legal representation of youth in the juvenile justice system. At present, the public defender, the alternate public defender, and panel attorneys under contract to the county handle legal representation. However, families thrown into crisis by a

child's arrest sometimes pay large sums of money to private criminal lawyers who may or may not have sufficient knowledge of juvenile law. Children's Planning Council representatives have met with panel attorneys and scheduled a meeting with the district attorney to discuss standards that could help that situation.

Although the CEO generally concurs with the remaining eight recommendations, it maintains that the county is already implementing them. When compared with the language of the original recommendations, though, Dr. McCroskey feels strongly that efforts claimed by the CEO do not measure up. (No countywide mechanism exists, for example, for obtaining regular input from youth and parents about their experiences with the juvenile justice system, although the Children's Planning Council could play a role in organizing that community feedback.) Prior to the departure of long-time Chief Executive Officer David Janssen, there was agreement that the Board of Supervisors would devote significant time to the reform recommendations. However, despite urgings from the Children's Planning Council, the new CEO, Bill Fujioka, has not yet scheduled that discussion. Dr. McCroskey believes that the Commission's advocacy in that regard might be helpful.

Commissioner Biondi decried the CEO's refusal to separate Probation's juvenile and adult functions; the divided model is used all over the country, and is the single change she believes would truly reform the system. One reason cited against it is the arbitrary division it makes by age, but since both the law and the vast majority of funding streams make equally arbitrary determinations by age, she does not see this as sufficient justification to deny the recommendation. A related problem is the placement of juvenile probation within the cluster system of the revised county organizational chart. Every other county agency with which juvenile probation collaborates is located in another cluster; if juveniles remain part of the adult department, within the public safety cluster, they will be overwhelmed by adult issues and will not receive the rehabilitation services the county is legally obligated to provide them. Commissioner Biondi suggested that the Commission write to the Board of Supervisors requesting that this issue be heard.

Chair Kleinberg expressed her disappointment that the CEO's reasoning seemed to be more about departmental structure and convenience than about the county's clients and the massive changes that are necessary within the juvenile justice system. She hopes the Children's Planning Council will function as the oversight group for the reform effort, looking at all the pieces involved—camp redesign, crossover youth, fatalities, the Title IV-E waiver, multidisciplinary teams, and so on.

Children's Planning Council member Dr. Sharon Watson—who also spoke of early system experiences, growing up with five family members hospitalized for mental illness, and spending more than a year running the mental health unit at Riker's Island prison in New York—reported on meetings with the Board of Supervisors' offices around the juvenile justice recommendations. If the children's and adult functions of Probation cannot be separated, efforts are underway to ensure that a lead person of sufficient status participates in the children and families' well-being cluster. Some of the other recom-

mendations are already proceeding, but Dr. Watson believes that a Board-level discussion is vital to pushing for overall reform.

Supervisor Don Knabe has already taken steps to implement the Council's first recommendation, to establish charter schools and other innovative education programs in juvenile halls and camps. At his request, an implementation committee is being chaired by Chief Probation Officer Robert Taylor and includes representatives from the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the Department of Mental Health, DCFS, the county libraries, the Probation Commission, the Children's Planning Council, the Education Coordinating Council, and the Youth Law Center. The group will take four to five months to develop a plan; its fifth meeting will take place tomorrow. Since none of its members has expertise in charter schools, meetings have been arranged between Chief Taylor and Steve Barr of Green Dot (a former foster youth himself) and Paul Cummins of the New Visions Foundation, who has run a camp after-school program for several years.

Although whatever is learned will eventually be transferred to the juvenile halls, the group plans to start the effort at probation camps because youth remain there longer; the average stay at a juvenile hall is only 19 days. A critical mass of students is also ideal, and Mr. Barr was interested to learn that several facilities have more than one camp on the same site. Camp teachers are currently employed by the Los Angeles County Office of Education, which over the next month is working on a strategic plan for how its programs could be changed, especially to provide a longer school day.

In working with the Education Coordinating Council, Dr. McCroskey has learned that a major issue for youth in camps is the transition upon their release—returning to low-performing schools, being directed to alternative education programs, or not being encouraged to continue their education at all. Charter school programs that could streamline the school day, after school, and back into the community would have the maximum impact on students. Once they come home, wrapping services around these youth and their families is vital, since few are equipped to handle that transition.

Commissioner Williams also suggested a focus on skill-based work, job training, and career education, addressing the culture of poverty that makes it easy for youth to get into the drug culture if they lack economic self-sufficiency. And although Vice Chair Rudnick's emphasis on the caliber of teaching is important, qualifications often have less of an impact than continuity, Dr. Watson said. Constant teacher turnaround and a parade of substitutes are the norm in juvenile facilities, just when solid relationships could contribute so positively to student education. The implementation group is making sure that both staff qualifications and teacher continuity are addressed, as well as expanding career development options into white-collar areas such as information technology.

Commissioner Biondi raised the issue of letters being sent to parents and caregivers by the Probation Department's restitution unit, claiming the standard cost reimbursement for youngsters who are housed in juvenile halls or probation camps. Families are being given the wrong information on the telephone, and are threatened with a collection agency if they do not immediately respond. One grandmother, sent a bill for \$4,772, was provided

no details and was told that if she wasn't able to appear on the day she was told to, she was agreeing to all charges. Dr. McCroskey shared a copy of that very confusing letter—for one thing, it was dated July 24 yet demanded that materials be submitted by July 22—at September's Children's Planning Council meeting, where Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke evinced much concern. The form letter is now being reconsidered and rewritten.

Commissioner Williams moved that the incoming Commission chair be asked to consider forming a subcommittee around education issues within the juvenile justice reform efforts. Commissioner Worthy-Clayton seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved. Commissioners Biondi, Worthy-Clayton, Savelle, and Friedman are interested in serving on such a group, which would work with representatives from the Children's Planning Council.

DCFS STAFFING PRESENTATION

Of the 7,299 budgeted positions for fiscal year 2007–2008, 745 are vacant. Claudine Crank presented vacancy rates for several categories of employee:

<u>Position</u>	<u>Number of Vacancies</u>	<u>Vacancy Rate</u>
Children's social workers	177	5.4%
Intermediate typist clerks	162	17.7%
Supervising children's social workers	24	2.8%
Senior typist clerks	43	17.7%
Eligibility workers	58	11.6%
Eligibility supervisors	10	11.9%
Human services aides	53	29.5%
Information technicians	22	17.3%
Adoptions assistants	17	17.0%

Over the last two years, human resources division chief Sheryl Negash reported, DCFS has made a concerted effort to become an 'employer of choice,' especially in social work circles. Studies show that people are interested in positions with good supervision that are close to home; retention factors include an awareness of what the job entails, an understanding of the impact on children and families, and a commitment to departmental outcomes. Some generational differences in employees exist, with baby boomers (mostly expected to retire within the next five to ten years) being interested in the stability and benefits of a public agency job, while younger people tend to expect three to five careers in their lifetimes and are more attracted by up-to-date technology, the possibility of telecommuting, and steady praise and feedback. The written test for children's social work trainees has been revised, and a new contractor has been retained to administer an additional battery of psychological tests. Ms. Negash admitted that recruiting for Spanish-speaking candidates could be more intensive, though bulletins in Spanish exist for CSW trainee positions.

DCFS partners with the county's Department of Human Resources on local recruitment efforts, and an internal committee is concentrating on recruiting for hard-to-fill positions.

Innovative ideas have included out-of-state recruitment at schools in New York, Georgia, New Jersey, Michigan, Illinois, and Nebraska. Because relocating to Los Angeles is expensive, however, that effort has met with little success. Unless young people have family or friends in the area with whom they can stay, student loan debt and the high cost of living usually prevents them from accepting positions. Still, many employees come to the department after experiences with other county agencies or as teachers. Of the 3,000 children's social worker positions, about two-thirds are CSW IIIs, with an average age of 45; the average age of CSW Is and CSW trainees is 31.

A subgroup of the internal committee is looking at recruitment for information technology positions, which is a challenge for all county departments. Retention in this area can also be difficult; after entry-level staff rise through their salary steps, they often depart for the private sector. Clerical recruiting suffers from competition from other county departments, since all hire from the same lists. To facilitate the process, DCFS has begun seeing candidates on Saturdays for fingerprint and medical clearances as well as initial interviews, processing the paperwork quickly. Of the 200 new human services aide positions approved in January 2006, all but 53 have been filled using this strategy, despite the challenges inherent in the \$39,400 HSA annual salary (as compared with \$43,000 for an adoptions worker or \$35,300 for an intermediate typist clerk).

In general, DCFS recruitment relies on word of mouth, job fairs, community organizations and events, and colleges and universities in the Southern California area. Commissioners suggested contacting San Jose State, which has a social work program, and institutions in Northern California that offer related non-social work programs. Creating an Internet presence through Craigslist or other web-based tools was also mentioned.

Commissioner Biondi suggested contacting the Child Welfare League of America about proposed legislation to reimburse social workers for the cost of their tuition, or to forgive a portion of their student loans, if they choose to work in public agencies. Commissioner Worthy-Clayton also counseled examining other aspects of the department with an eye to recruitment and retention, setting up the organization to meet the desires of the various workforce generations by restructuring jobs or making other adjustments.

To get a sense of what the department as a whole is looking for, Commissioners asked that all DCFS job announcements be forwarded to the Commission office, and also requested copies of all job descriptions and data on the racial balance within all positions.

Mark Miller highlighted efforts being made in the training section to support and prepare staff for work and position them for successful professional development. The section is:

- In partnership with local universities, gathering more rigorous information about the incoming workforce, to evaluate the kinds of knowledge they need during core academy training
- For new CSWs, facilitating earlier assignments to specific units and working with the accountable supervisors to ensure that new employees reinforce their training

- Developing the comprehensive ‘passport portfolio’ tool to link core academy training with field activities over an employee’s first nine months, using a case conferencing model and integrating the probationary performance evaluation

Challenges the training section experiences include:

- Tailoring the curriculum for cadres of recruits at different levels (those with MSWs and those with BAs, for example)
- Large numbers of people being hired at one time; in 2006, 600 people went through core academy training
- Building in time for skills training, demonstration, monitoring, mentoring, and coaching
- Better equipping the department’s 430 supervisors to support new employees throughout their probationary periods

Mr. Miller looks forward to implementing the passport portfolio concept, which was developed by the supervising CSW best-practices group and is now ready for review by the executive team. He sees new staff as change agents within DCFS, providing a positive opportunity for fresh perspectives and for infusing best-practices energy into the department as a whole.

Chair Kleinberg related disturbing scenarios she has heard about young employees quitting after only a short time because they were made to feel unwelcome in their assigned offices, and asked Mr. Miller for statistics on how many academy trainees end up staying with the department. Joi Russell from service bureau one said that three academy days are spent in the regional offices—emergency response, family maintenance, and the trainee’s assigned unit—getting to know people and procedures, and that veteran employees have been very cooperative and helpful.

Ms. Russell reiterated the difficulty of recruitment and retention in certain geographic areas because of the cost of living there. Employees must work for a year before they can put in a bid for an office transfer, and 42 percent of all transfer requests are for three offices in outlying, less expensive areas of the county: Pomona, El Monte, and Glendora. Most employees in the Lakewood office still live with their parents, DCFS struggles with retaining social workers in central Los Angeles, and recruitment on the Westside and in other more affluent areas is almost nonexistent.

The availability of social workers statewide is of increasing concern. In 2020, projections indicate that their ranks will be down by 14,000. DCFS is already losing workers to schools (as certificated counselors) and sometimes to the Probation Department—all of which points up the importance of giving candidates a clear view of their future, preparing them for the children and families they will serve, and instituting a rigorous, strength-based evaluation to discover as soon as possible if the job is right for them.

According to Walter Chan from the health and safety section of the risk management division, leaves of absence for employees are granted in three categories—temporary,

long-term, and those resulting in a permanent unpaid status. In DCFS, over 60 percent of leaves are temporary, lasting less than a year, and more than half of those result from accident or illness. Keeping employees safe and healthy is a primary focus of the department, and workplace ergonomic issues continue to be addressed; since March, Mr. Chan's section has processed 80 requests for equipment adjustments.

As mentioned in the *Daily News* article distributed by Ms. Ploehn, approximately 25 percent of county employees have an open workers compensation case, but in DCFS, that figure is only 13 percent. An open case also does not mean that staff are not at work; they may still be on the job, waiting for a settlement agreement or other disposition of a case. At present, 65 employees are on stress leave with a related workers comp case, which Mr. Chan said was a low number for the department. All workers who are out for more than a year receive a full medical screening, including a psych test, before returning.

The DCFS safety committee has administered safety improvement surveys and is incorporating safety practices, and a return-to-work program has also been instituted for employees coming back with long-term or semi-permanent restrictions on their work activities. The department makes a considerable investment in its employees, and wants to return them to gainful employment whenever possible.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Debra Reid, founder of the Jonathan Reid Family Rights Coalition, announced a public hearing from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on October 8 at the Inglewood City Hall's community room. This hearing, sponsored by Assemblymembers Curren Price and Karen Bass, will discuss the lack of implementation of the Commission's 2004 family reunification committee recommendations and possible legislation to address that. Ms. Reid urged Commissioners to advocate that biological parents be included as stakeholders.
- Susie Taylor reported difficulties in adopting her three grandchildren, and Commissioners referred her to DCFS liaison Susan Jakubowski for assistance.

MEETING ADJOURNED